

At the 1969 National Chicano Youth Conference in Denver, delegates, mostly male, resolved that Chicanas were opposed to their own liberation! Middle-class Chicanas also had a difficult time gaining a forum for their views. In 1970, efforts to establish a Chicana caucus at the annual convention of MAPA proved premature.

Some of the resistance to feminist demands came from the ranks of their own sisters. As Anna Nieto-Gómez, herself an early feminist champion, has pointed out, women within the Chicano movement soon came to be divided into two general categories, which she calls the "loyalists" and the "feminists."⁶⁶ The first recognized that *mujeres* were oppressed within their own ethnic communities but felt that ultimately Anglo institutions were to blame. Moreover, they believed that criticism of Hispanic men would serve only to sow the seeds of dissension. Feminists, however, argued that the oppression they experienced within their own communities was as bad as that encountered from the dominant society. They felt that in returning to their cultural roots, many Chicanos had unfortunately come to glorify all aspects of the culture indiscriminately, including the misogynistic elements. Feminists insisted on speaking out against the machismo and sexual abuse rampant in the movement.

This widening schism among women activists came out in the open at the First National Chicana Conference, *Mujeres Por La Raza* (Women for La Raza), in May 1971, when six hundred delegates from the Southwest and Midwest met in Houston. The debates were extraordinarily animated and the two sides quickly polarized. Eventually, loyalists, almost half the delegates in attendance, including the highly regarded Enriqueta Longeaux y Vásquez, walked out of the meeting in protest, ostensibly because of alleged neglect of *mujeres* in the barrio.

At first, feminists were put on the defensive by charges of being sellouts. Labeled traitors, they came to identify with La Malinche, who though much maligned historically for helping Cortés conquer her own people, was now adopted by them as a symbol of womanhood and revered as the mother of the Mexican mestizo. Moreover, their critics also tried to discredit them by identifying emerging feminism with the small lesbian minority within their ranks, thus cashing in on the homophobia that pervades Mexican culture.⁶⁷

Undaunted, Chicana feminists began to form their own caucuses within Chicano conferences. They also initiated their own publications. While not exclusively feminist in its orientation, one of the earliest and most influential was *Regeneración*, which appeared in Los Angeles beginning in 1971. *Encuentro Femenil*, published by Nieto-Gómez and Adelaida del Castillo in 1973-1974, was the first major student publication. Chicana feminists worked with community-based women's service organizations, and before long they created their own associations distinct from those of other members of La Causa. In fact, some of them antedated the Houston Conference. Among these early women's groups were Las Chicanas at San Diego State University and Hijas de Cuauhtémoc at Long Beach State University.⁶⁸ The